Lateral

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# Review of *Biopolitics, Geopolitics, Life: Settler States and Indigenous Presence* edited by René Dietrich and Kerstin Knopf (Duke University Press)

by Leah Kuragano | Book Reviews, Issue 13.2 (Fall 2024)

ABSTRACT Questions of violence, governance, life, and land have long animated critique within settler colonial studies and Indigenous studies. *Biopolitics, Geopolitics, Life* interrogates these lines of inquiry by centering Indigenous politics and onto-epistemologies from a variety of disciplines and across a range of settler colonial contexts to address the enmeshments of bio- and geopolitical logics and practices.

KEYWORDS American Studies, Indigenous studies, Native studies, biopolitics, critical ethnic studies, settler colonialism

*Biopolitics, Geopolitics, Life: Settler States and Indigenous Presence*. Edited by René Dietrich and Kerstin Knopf. Durham, NC and London, UK: Duke University Press, 2023, 296 pp. (paperback) ISBN 978-1-4780-1976-3. US List: $27.95.

Questions of violence, governance, life, and land have long animated critique within settler colonial studies and Indigenous studies. *Biopolitics, Geopolitics, Life* interrogates these lines of inquiry by centering Indigenous politics and onto-epistemologies from a variety of disciplines and across a range of settler colonial contexts to address the enmeshments of bio- and geopolitical logics and practices. Although the majority of the essays (those by Mishuana Goeman, Sandy Grande, Mark Rifkin, Sabine N. Meyer, and Jacqueline Fear-Segal) focus on

the settler colonial conditions of the so-called continental United States, other contributors center their attention on Canada (Robert Nichols), Hawai'i (David Uahikeaikalei'ohu Maile), Guyana (Shona N. Jackson), Australia and Aotearoa (Michael R. Griffiths), and Brazil (Kerstin Knopf).

Each of the essays explicitly take up theories of biopower, making this edited volume a valuable addition to course syllabi in critical or political theory. For example, a reading of Robert Nichols's essay on the settler colonial racism of Canada's prison system (Chapter 3) accompanied by Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *The Birth of Biopolitics* would invite an especially fruitful classroom discussion. Likewise, Sabine N. Meyer's analysis of bio- and geopolitical enmeshments represented in Native American Removal literature (Chapter 7) would be a dynamic companion to Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, as Meyer's essay responds to this foundational text in depth. These essays enrich our understandings of biopower by applying influential theoretical frameworks to present-day Indigenous experiences and instances of settler state violence.

As co-editor René Dietrich describes at length in the introduction to the text, race and racialization are key through-lines within this collection. Many of the essays add to a growing body of scholarship that asks how race and indigeneity function as distinct yet related categories of analysis within settler colonial critique. In Chapter 2, Sandy Grande (Quechua) argues that Indigenous conceptions of aging rupture the settler colonial, white supremacist, and racial capitalist logics that underpin the biomedical management of the elderly. Kanaka Maoli scholar David Uahikeaikalei'ohu Maile's essay (Chapter 4) assesses the US government's offer of federal tribal recognition to Indigenous Hawaiians as one premised on their biopolitical racialization by the settler state. Grande and Maile capture two unique contexts within which the US has sought to buttress its power by managing Indigenous peoples as racialized populations.

Shona N. Jackson (Chapter 5) and Mark Rifkin (Chapter 6) extend this examination of race by focusing their studies on the politics of racialized non-Indigenous subjects within settler colonial societies. Rifkin reads Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy of Afrofuturist novels as an anti-racist critique of Euro-American humanness that erases Indigenous place-based peoplehood. Jackson examines the settler colonial and biopolitical logics that shape (Afro and Indo) Creole–Indigenous relations and conceptions of "sovereignty" in post-independence Guyana. Rifkin's and Jackson's essays evoke an important ongoing discussion, invigorated by scholars such as Tiffany Lethabo King and Jodi Byrd, that seeks to build political solidarities between Black, Indigenous, and people of color living under settler colonialism.[1] It is worth mentioning, however, that *Biopolitics, Geopolitics, Life* notably elides the growing body of literature on Asian settler colonialism. Dietrich's introduction cites several scholars whose work has "demonstrated the insufficiency of a rigid settler-Native binary to account for slavery and forms of forced migration" (10). Although it is true that many have rejected the use of the term "settler" to describe non-Indigenous racialized subjects, other prominent scholars, including Haunani-Kay Trask, Candace Fujikane, and Dean Itsuji Saranillio, have presented distinct perspectives on this issue at the intersections of Asian American, Indigenous, and settler colonial studies.[2]

Methodologically, *Biopolitics, Geopolitics, Life* represents a wide range of approaches. Scholars of literature will appreciate that four of the ten chapters engage in literary analysis, including the aforementioned essays by Rifkin and Meyer. In Chapter 1, Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca) reads the work of three Indigenous women writers—Deborah Miranda, Louise Erdich, and Frances A. Washburn—to observe how their storytelling practices "witness" systemic violence against Native women as linked to land dispossession. Michael R. Griffiths (Chapter 8) turns to works by Māori author Witi Ihimaera and Noongar author Kim Scott to propose a decolonial reading practice that refuses to simply

subsume writing from Indigenous epistemological perspectives into the magical realism genre.

Cultural studies scholars will be interested in the contributions made by Jacqueline Fear-Segal (Chapter 9), co-editor Kerstin Knopf (Chapter 10), and Alyosha Goldstein (Foreword). Fear-Segal's analysis of photographs and drawings at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania argues that Indigenous students used creative tactics to protect themselves and assert forms of visual sovereignty. Knopf's essay analyzes *Birdwatchers*, a 2008 film from director Marco Bechis that represents the struggles of the Indigenous Guaraní to reclaim their ancestral lands in Brazil. Knopf contends that the film highlights the conditions of de/reterritorialization, a biopolitical process through which the settler state of Brazil has refigured Indigenous lands as "post/colonial space." Goldstein's foreword provides a fascinating examination of Mi'kmaq filmmaker Jeff Barnaby's *Blood Quantum* (2019) and the "immunological paradigm" of settler colonial governance. These three contributions demonstrate how creative visual-cultural production can mobilize Indigenous defiance and present salient critiques of settler state violence.

The essays in *Biopolitics, Geopolitics, Life* are provocative and cutting-edge, and offer many potential uses for research and teaching. The volume feels cohesive, and the chapters are exceptionally well-organized around key ideas and frameworks, which encourages readers to explore linkages across fields and cultural and geopolitical contexts. Indigenous and settler colonial studies scholars, especially those working within political science, literature, and visual and cultural studies, will surely find this volume to be a valuable resource.

# Notes

1. See Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Duke University Press, 2019). ↩

2. For essays by Trask, Fujikane, and Saranillio on this topic, see Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura, eds., *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008). ↩

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